



Joint strategy to combat Illegal Wildlife Trade in Central Asia

Press-Release

Central Asian countries hold technical workshop and agree to join forces in the fight against illegal wildlife trade in the region.

A joint strategy was developed as a key outcome in the first ever regional workshop, focused on combating illegal wildlife trade in Central Asia. The workshop, held in the Kyrgyz capital Bishkek on September 17 & 18, was attended by representatives of environmental and law enforcement agencies from Kyrgyzstan, as well as governmental and non-governmental organizations from Kazakhstan, Russia and Tajikistan and international conservation organizations.

“Wildlife crime occurring in the region includes poaching, trafficking and trade primarily in endangered snow leopards, bears, ungulates and birds”, said Mr. Rustam Muratov of Tajikistan.

Only a small proportion of these illegally trafficked wildlife products ultimately end up in Central Asia – but delegates at the workshop recognized that their countries are frequently used for transit of such products on their way, towards illegal markets in East Asia, the Middle East, Europe and America.

Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia and Tajikistan are determined to stop these crimes. **“We need to align our efforts in the preparation and implementation of an Action Plan to combat illegal wildlife trade in our countries and work together in a coordinated manner”,** said Sabir Atadjanov, Director of the State Agency for Environmental Protection and Forestry under the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic and host of the workshop.

Corruption, lack of competence of executing bodies, low incentives, lack of accountability, insufficient coordination between organizations and inadequate capacity of frontline staff were identified as the main challenges to implementing effective law enforcement strategies to combat wildlife crime in the region.

“With joint efforts, these challenges can be met”, said Mr. Ilya Ivanochkin, Russian Federation. Opportunities the delegates identified include the use of existing legal frameworks and the establishment of mechanisms for inter-agency collaboration and cooperation. **“Providing targeted training to frontline staff including rangers, police, custom officers and border service personnel is essential”,** added Kubanychbek Jumabai Uulu, the Kyrgyzstan program director for the Snow Leopard Trust, one of the workshop’s co-organizers. **“Thanks to a grant from the UK government, we’ve already begun to train rangers in Kyrgyzstan’s protected areas in cooperation with INTERPOL. Such efforts could be scaled up across the region”,** he added.

Educating the public via conventional and social media, establishing multidisciplinary wildlife enforcement networks, and providing incentives to encourage frontline staff were also identified as priorities, and the need to establish a Regional Wildlife Enforcement Network was highlighted. Techniques for monitoring wildlife crime were also discussed. **“We require reliable, replicable and robust indicators to monitor wildlife crime”,** said Koustubh Sharma, Senior Regional Ecologist of Snow Leopard Trust and International Coordinator of the GSLEP Secretariat.

INTERPOL's Luke Bond added, **“there is need for a multi-agency coordinated, collaborative and strategic regional response supported by National Environmental Security Taskforces within each participating country to combat the threat posed by wildlife crime.”**

Such a regional network was proposed as part of the draft strategy delegates elaborated. Its goal will be to focus on common themes cutting across international boundaries to provide greater control over illegal poaching and trafficking of wildlife; to share intelligence, conduct joint operations, engage in advocacy and identify capacity building opportunities.

The State Agency for Environmental Protection and Forestry under the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic, along with the Secretariat of the Global Snow Leopard and Ecosystem Protection Program (GSLEP), the Global Environment Facility Small Grants Program – UNDP in Kyrgyzstan (GEF/SGP-UNDP), Snow Leopard Trust (SLT), United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and INTERPOL were key organizers of this workshop.

This workshop is a continuation of the joint actions of the 12 snow leopard range countries following the adoption of the Bishkek Declaration on Conservation of snow leopard at the Global Forum on Snow Leopard Conservation held in October 2013 under the leadership of the President of the Kyrgyz Republic, Hon. Mr. Almazbek Atambayev. **“Such workshops with clear outcomes build our faith in believing that we will achieve the GSLEP goal of securing at least 20 landscapes by 2020”**, said Mr. Kuat Chumakaev of Kazakhstan

The GSLEP aims to ensure the long-term survival of the snow leopard in its natural ecosystem. It is a joint initiative of the governments of the range countries, international organizations, civil society and the private sector.

“We’re looking forward to work with Central Asian countries to circulate and implement this new strategy once the document is finalized”, said Kyial Alygulova, the GSLEP secretariat’s manager.

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